Social Evolution

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The degree of human social life is evaluated by the degree of cultural development. Culture is a unique characteristic of human society, and coexists with human life … Social evolution started before the appearance of humankind, and cultural evolution started at the very beginning of human life. The development of culture and human life started simultaneously. Social evolution originated from organic evolution, and cultural evolution originated from social evolution.

What is the place of social evolution and cultural evolution in the progress of world evolution? We know that world evolution is a natural sequence. At the very beginning there were merely physical and chemical phenomena in the world; after a long period of development life and society came into being. The final and the highest product of progressive evolution is culture…

If we want to understand the fact of social evolution, we must realize that the methods and concepts used to study organic evolution are unable to provide sufficient assistance in our study of social evolution.

First, the subject of organic science (plants or animals) is relevant to inheritance, but culture is not inherited … and has no relevance to race. Culture is superorganic and beyond the sphere of biology; secondly, human physiology has not changed much since the end of the glacial epoch. The Neanderthal, who has been considered to be the earliest ancestor of human beings, had a very large skull; the Cro-Magnon, who was more advanced and similar to the modern man, had obviously large brain capacity. According to anthropology, their physical strength and brain capacity were little different from those of modern man, but there is an enormous difference between their stone-age culture and modern culture.

In sum it is safe to say that social evolution depends on the development of culture, and cultural evolution determines the direction of social evolution …

In the nineteenth century geologists, paleontologists, and biologists proposed many theories of developmental stages. They held that without exception all organic life went through these stages from the earliest geological epoch to the modern epoch. This led to the idea of the developmental stages of society. Herbert Spencer held that the political and social systems of society experienced many changes, which proceeded in a certain sequence, from simple systems to complex systems. Lewis Morgan's Ancient Society can be seen as the "comprehensive" model of this kind of conception of evolution …

The anthropologists of our time do not accept such an argument. Instead of making a sweeping generalization, they have paid much attention to the study of the cultural traits of particular

groups, which has led them to reject the proposition that without exception all nations have to go though the same social or Cultural stages…

We also reject the proposition that there are necessary stages of economic progress. First, there is hardly any standard way to measure the unit of, for example, technology or economy, organization or type of commerce, or means of exchange, none of which can be seen as the basis for the economic stage of a nation. The stage of economic life includes a great number of interrelated factors. Among them we cannot find a single factor that bears particular importance. The economy is very intricate, and a cultural complex includes not only economic but also psychological and social factors. More often than not these factors can change the nature and function of economic factors in society. The same economic and technological conditions do not necessarily result in the same culture. It is true that economic life exercises its influence on culture, but economic life is not the factor that can change all social factors; secondly, economic change, like historical change, has a strong system of continuity, it is not so easy to create a division, and the change in different aspects of the economy does not occur at the same rate. Very few groups in the world have gone through all the assigned stages without transcendence. The theory of economic stages, therefore, is as implausible as Morgan's theory of cultural stages.

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